

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SWEDENBORGIAN WAY OF LIFE

Rev. Dr. David J. Fekete

All religion is of life; and a religious life is doing good (Swedenborg, *Doctrine of Life* 1).

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WEEK I-INTRODUCTION

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SWEDENBORGIAN WAY OF LIFE

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All religion is of life; and a religious life is doing good (*Doctrine of Life* 1).

For Swedenborg, religion comes down to thinking right and living right. All his 30 volumes of theology are about how to live a good and holy life. So instead of calling this course “An Introduction to Swedenborg,” I’m calling it “An Introduction to the Swedenborgian **Way of Life.**” My aim in this course is to emphasize spiritual living, not just ideas and theories.

Swedenborg’s theology is truly a “way,” a path. Like other Christian mystics such as St. John of the Cross, Swedenborg writes about a path of spiritual attainment. He describes stages of spiritual growth; he explains the feelings we will go through; he explains the processes in spiritual growth. This is much like St. John of the Cross’s *Dark Night of the Soul*, which describes the soul’s ascent to God and stages that we go through.

The Swedenborgian religion is Christian. But it is so different from traditional Christianity that many of Swedenborg’s ideas do not fit with traditional Christianity. What I will do in this course is present the theology of traditional Christianity alongside Swedenborg’s theology. This will serve three purposes. It will introduce students to the beliefs of traditional Christianity. It will show where Swedenborg differs from traditional Christianity. And it will give students material from which they can think for themselves about spirituality and differences between traditional Christianity and Swedenborg’s theology. Thus students will be able to make an informed decision about whether the Swedenborgian way of life makes sense to them, and whether they wish to follow it and/or add Swedenborgian theology to their own spiritual life.

Much of the reading material will be “lectures” by Rev. Dr. Fekete. But as this is to be an introduction to Swedenborg, readings from Swedenborg’s actual books will be presented at the end of each week’s lesson. The selections will pertain to the week’s subject. I hope that with the introductory comments I provide, students will find the Swedenborg selections understandable.

Swedenborg has been criticized for being hard to understand. Some of this is due to bad translations, which the New Century Edition translations help to some degree. But Swedenborg writes about deep and complex subjects. One must think about what one reads in Swedenborg and digest it mentally. Furthermore, Swedenborg was one of the most brilliant persons ever to live and studied all the subjects of learning that were available in his time. He studied all the sciences, philosophy, poetry, literature, mathematics, and religion. He used his vast learning when in his theology. So do not be surprised if you encounter difficulty when you read the Swedenborg selections. But give it a try.

Creating this course has been a labor of love for me. I love religion in general. But I love Swedenborg’s theology in particular. I’ve studied the history of and different sects of Christianity, as well as Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, and Confucianism. I use some of their teachings in my own spirituality, but for me, the Swedenborgian way of life is at the core of my own spirituality.

WEEK II: GOD IMAGE

Swedenborg claims that having a correct idea of God is of paramount importance. He says that it is at "the very core of the thinking of anyone who has a religion." Here is what Swedenborg says about it:

Divine Love and Wisdom n. 13: We may gather how important it is to have a right concept of God from the fact that this concept is the very core of the thinking of anyone who has a religion. All the elements of religion and of worship focus on God; and since God is involved in every element of religion and worship, whether general or particular, unless there is a right concept of God there can be no communication with heaven. This is why every nation is allotted its place in the spiritual world according to its concept of a human God. This [understanding of God as human] is where the concept of the Lord is to be found, and nowhere else. We can see very clearly that our state after death depends on our avowed concept of God if we consider the opposite, namely that the denial of God, and in the Christian world, a denial of the Lord's divinity, constitutes hell.

TRADITIONAL CHRISTIANITY:

Traditional Christianity divides God into three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each of these names is a different Person. This doctrine of three Persons is called the trinity. Yet, while asserting that God is three Persons, Christians maintain that these three Persons are one. Swedenborg thought that traditional Christians were poly-theists and that essentially, Christians believe in three gods. The doctrine of the trinity can be found in the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed. The Nicene Creed was formulated in 312 CE and the Council of Nicaea. The Council of Nicaea was convened by Constantine because he saw that Christians all over the Empire were disputing and arguing about doctrinal matters that were difficult to understand. He thought that if he brought all the bishops together they could settle matters. The result was the Nicene Creed.

Nicene Creed:

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Athanasian Creed:

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith. Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled; without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons; nor dividing the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is; such is the Son; and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreated; the Son uncreated; and the Holy Ghost uncreated. The Father unlimited; the Son unlimited; and the Holy Ghost unlimited. The Father eternal; the Son eternal; and the Holy Ghost eternal. And yet they are not three eternals; but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated; nor three infinities, but one uncreated; and one infinite. So likewise the Father is Almighty; the Son Almighty; and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighties; but one Almighty. So the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not three Gods; but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord; the Son Lord; and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not three Lords; but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity; to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; So are we forbidden by the catholic religion; to say, There are three Gods, or three Lords. The Father is made of none; neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created; but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten; but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is before, or after another; none is greater, or less than another. But the whole three Persons are coeternal, and coequal. So that in all things, as aforesaid; the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved, let him thus think of the Trinity. Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation; that he also believe faithfully the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess; that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the Essence of the Father; begotten before the worlds; and Man, of the Essence of his Mother, born in the world. Perfect God; and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the Father as touching his Manhood. Who although he is God and Man; yet he is not two, but one Christ. One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh; but by assumption of the Manhood by God. One altogether; not by confusion of Essence; but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man; so God and Man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation;

descended into hell; rose again the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven, he sitteth on the right hand of the God the Father Almighty, from whence he will come to judge the living and the dead. At whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies; And shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire. This is the catholic faith; which except a man believe truly and firmly, he cannot be saved.

SWEDENBORGIAN VIEW:

Swedenborg's image of God is different from that of traditional Christianity. For Swedenborg, the Old Testament God, Yahweh (Jehovah, in King James Version of the Bible), Came down to earth and took on a human body as Jesus. The Old Testament God is the soul of Jesus and Jesus is the body of the Old Testament God. God's outgoing power and influence is God's Spirit, called The Holy Spirit. So there is One Person who is God: Jesus. Jesus' soul is the Father, and the outgoing power of Jesus is the Holy Spirit. In the language of Hinduism, Jesus can be considered an "Avatar" of Yahweh--an incarnation of the Infinite, Eternal God. For Swedenborg, God is the One Divine Human.

Divine Love and Religion n. 11: God is the essential person. Throughout all the heavens, the only concept of God is a concept of a person. The reason is that heaven, overall and regionally, is in a kind of human form, and Divinity among the angels is what makes heaven. Further, thinking proceeds in keeping with heaven's form, so it is not possible for angels to think about God in any other way. This is why all the people on earth who are in touch with heaven think about God in the same way when they are thinking very deeply, or in their spirit. It is because God is a person that all angels and spirits are perfectly formed people. This is because of heaven's form, which is the same in its largest and its smallest manifestations.

Swedenborg thought that these creeds taught three gods. He lampooned the idea of the trinity in *True Christian Religion* (*True Christianity* in the New Century Edition):

True Christian Religion n. 141: It was proved above, and will be shown more fully in the following numbers devoted specially to the subject, that the Divine Trinity is in the Lord. At this point we shall merely mention certain absurdities arising from the division of the Trinity into Persons. It would be as if a minister of the Church should teach from the pulpit what ought to be believed and practiced, and another should stand at his side and whisper in his ear: "You say truly, continue;" and they should say to a third, standing on the steps of the pulpit: "Go down into the church, open the ears of the people, and put these things into their hearts; and at the same time make them pure, holy and subjects of righteousness." Again, the Divine Trinity divided into Persons, each of Whom singly is God and Lord, would be like three suns in one solar system, one placed on high, the second near it, and the third below them both, encompassing angels and men, and conveying the heat and light of the other two with all their

power to their minds, hearts and bodies; and as fire acts upon material substances in retorts, rousing, purifying and refining them. Anyone may see that if this were to happen, men would be reduced to ashes. The government, of three Divine Persons in heaven may also be compared to the government of three kings in one kingdom, or of three generals of equal authority over one army; or rather to the Roman government before the time of the Caesars, when there were consuls, a senate and tribunes of the people, amongst whom power was indeed divided, yet all had supreme power at the same time. Anyone may see the incongruity, the absurdity and the folly of introducing such a government into heaven; and yet this happens when there is ascribed to the Father a power like that of the supreme consul, to the Son a power like that of the senate, and to the Holy Spirit a power like that of a tribune of the people, especially when a peculiar function is attributed to each, and it is added that those functions are not communicable.

In the New Testament, Jesus is called Son of God, which indeed makes it look like Jesus and God are two separate Beings. And Jesus prays to God as to another Being. These Bible passages make Swedenborg's idea hard to accept for some. But there are other Bible passages in which Jesus and God are seen to be One Being.

John 10:30: I and the Father are one.

John 8:42: "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I proceeded and came forth from God."

Jesus then makes the shocking statement that He is the same Yahweh God who appeared to Moses at the burning bush, by saying, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am" (8:58). This statement is a reference to Exodus 3:14-15. God appears to Moses in a fiery bush. When Moses asks God for His name, God answers with the same exact words of Jesus, "I am."

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3:14-15).

The Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek--the language of the Gospels. The Greek edition of the Hebrew Scriptures is called the Septuagint. God's words to Moses in the Greek of the Septuagint are identical to Jesus' words in the Greek of John's Gospel, "ego eimi"—I Am. Claiming to be God Himself incenses the Jews so much that they try to stone Jesus to death for blaspheme, "So they took up stones to throw at him" (8:59).

John 13:31-32: Jesus said, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified; if God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.

John 14:7-11: If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him." Philip said to him, "Lord, show

us the Father, and we shall be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves.

John 15:10: If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

Luke 1:35: The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So **the holy one** to be born will be called the Son of God.

"The Holy One" is a theological term from the Old Testament that means Yahweh (Jehovah), as in Isaiah 43:3, "For I am YAHWEH, your God,/ **the Holy One** of Israel, your Savior;" 43:14, " This is what Yahweh says—/your Redeemer, **the Holy One** of Israel;" 43:15, "I am Yahweh, your **Holy One**,/Israel's Creator, your King."¹ So when the angel Gabriel tells Mary that Jesus is the Holy One, Gabriel is saying that Jesus is the Old Testament Yahweh.

FOR FURTHER READING:

True Christian Religion (True Christianity) nos. 5-184, (Ch. I-III).

Doctrine of the Lord

Angelic Wisdom concerning Divine Love and Wisdom nos. 1-6, 11-13, 17-33.

¹ Other Old Testament references to Yahweh as "the Holy One are: Daniel 4:10, 13; Habakkuk 3:3; Isaiah 1:4; 5:19; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19; 30:11, 12; 41:16; 47:4; 48:41; 49:7; 54:5; Psalm 78:41; Jeremiah 51:5.

WEEK III: HEAVEN AND HELL

TRADITIONAL CHRISTIANITY:

There is a myth behind traditional Christianity's understanding of heaven and hell. The myth concerns angels and demons. Angels and demons in traditional Christianity are a semi-divine class of beings. They are different from mortal human beings. The myth goes like this:

In the beginning, there were only angels and God. Lucifer was the highest angel. Pride took over Lucifer, and he desired to rule all the created universe. War broke out in heaven—angels against angels. Lucifer had an army of angels on his side and God had an army of angels on His side. Lucifer was defeated and cast down from heaven into the newly created hell. Lucifer became the ruler of hell, and his army became the demons in hell. Some say that Lucifer was also given to rule the earth.

There is scant Biblical support for this myth. The only real source for this myth is **Isaiah 14:12-17**:

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!
For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north:
I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.
Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.
They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms;
That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners?

Modern translations read this passage as pertaining to the kingdom of Babylon in the 6th century BCE.

Traditional Christianity teaches that humans are judged by Jesus when they die and are either sent to heaven to live with the angels or cast down to hell to be tormented by demons. Heaven is described in different ways. Some say that it is a paradisiacal garden where good souls rest in bliss. Others say that it is a place like church where people sing praises to God. Hell is a fiery place where one burns eternally and is tortured by demons.

In some popular beliefs, souls live forever in heaven or hell. But the church teaches that when we die we sleep in our graves. Then there will be a final judgement when Jesus comes in the clouds of heaven. The dead will rise up out of their graves. Jesus will judge the human race and separate the good from the evil. The good will live on earth in human form on a restored planet that will be like the garden of Eden. The evil will be cast down to burn forever in hell and be tormented by demons. This teaching is stated briefly in the Nicene Creed:

“He [Jesus] shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. . . and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.”

Most Christians believe that Jesus saves. So only those who accept Jesus as their savior are saved. Believers of other religions, who do not believe in Jesus, are damned. The primary Biblical verse for this is **John 3:16**:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

SWEDENBORGIAN VIEW:

Swedenborg’s view of heaven and hell has little in common with that of traditional Christianity. Angels and demons are not a separate class of beings. They are both from the human race. Angels are good people who have transitioned into the next life and demons are bad people who have transitioned into the next life. The life we live in heaven or hell is a continuation of the life we here on earth.

No one is cast into hell by God, nor does God open the pearly gates for others. People choose for themselves according to where they are most comfortable. Heat and light shine forth from God in the next life. The heat is God’s love—don’t we say that loving people are warm? And light is God’s wisdom—don’t we say that smart people are brilliant, or bright? Our task on earth is to become loving and wise. When we have love in our hearts and wisdom in our minds, we can live in heaven’s heat and light. Mean-spirited people who have not cultivated a loving disposition, and who prefer false notions over the truth can’t stand heaven’s heat and brilliant light. Of their own accord, they depart from the light and heat and find their way to a place away from God in which the dark cold feels more comfortable. The Swedenborgian poet William Blake captures this idea well in a poem entitled THE LITTLE BLACK BOY:

My mother bore me in the southern wild,
And I am black, but O! my soul is white;
White as an angel is the English child:
But I am black as if bereav'd of light.

My mother taught me underneath a tree
And sitting down before the heat of day,
She took me on her lap and kissed me,
And pointing to the east began to say.

Look on the rising sun: there God does live
And gives his light, and gives his heat away.
And flowers and trees and beasts and men receive
Comfort in morning joy in the noonday.

And we are put on earth a little space,
That we may learn to bear the beams of love,
And these black bodies and this sun-burnt face
Is but a cloud, and like a shady grove.

For when our souls have learn'd the heat to bear
The cloud will vanish we shall hear his voice.
Saying: come out from the grove my love & care,
And round my golden tent like lambs rejoice.

Thus did my mother say and kissed me,
And thus I say to little English boy.
When I from black and he from white cloud free,
And round the tent of God like lambs we joy:

I'll shade him from the heat till he can bear,
To lean in joy upon our fathers knee.
And then I'll stand and stroke his silver hair,
And be like him and he will then love me.

Heaven or hell are much like life here on earth, according to the Lord's Prayer, "On earth as it is in heaven." Everyone has a job in heaven or hell that they love to do. Swedenborg says that sitting in a garden would get boring after a while as would singing praises. One is most happy doing something that we love to do. Some study, some are governors, some are teachers, some work with children, some guard humans from evil spirits—in fact there are so many functions that they can't be named. There are more functions than there are on earth and there is full employment in heaven. Think of what you love to do most, and you will be doing that for eternity. There are two principal loves in heaven—love for God and everything that is good, and love for each other. In heaven, everyone tries to make everyone else happy and feels happy when others are happy.

In hell there is perpetual frustration. The two principal loves in hell are to possess everything in creation, or a craving for unlimited wealth, and a desire to control or dominate others. The desire to control can reach such intensity as to wish to control God Himself, i.e., to be god. Since you can't have everything, those who want it all and can't have it all are frustrated. Those who want to control are allowed to control—for a while. But the people they rule over hate being dominated. So they rebel and another person ends up dominating the others.

It is important to stress that everyone can come into heaven. God wants everyone to be with God in heaven and to be as happy as we can bear. We are free to turn in any direction we want. No one can blunder into hell by accident. People who choose hell do so because they want to be bad and deliberately do what they know to be bad, because it is bad. People find heaven when they want to be good and strive to be good according to what they know to be good.

Since heaven is a place of spiritual warmth, all warm people are comfortable there. Thus everyone trying to be good, according to their best understanding of good, come into heaven. Hindus, Moslems, Buddhists, Jews, and followers of all the world's religions can come into heaven.

How does Swedenborg come up with these ideas? Swedenborg's claim is that he had visionary experiences of heaven and hell while he was on earth. That is, he saw into the next life. It seems that this is not such a hard idea to accept these days, as there are many life-after-life accounts and stories of people who have seen angels and even God in near-death experiences. It may be quite a claim of Swedenborg's. The real question is whether this idea makes sense.

Biblical support is essentially non-existent for Swedenborg's idea of heaven and hell. In fact, there is surprisingly little in the Bible at all about heaven and hell. Swedenborg wrote a whole book describing heaven and hell. Though he describes what heaven and hell are like, all through the book, Swedenborg says that words cannot capture the reality of the next life.

Swedenborg on Heaven and Hell:

People in the Christian world are totally unaware that heaven and hell come from the human race. They actually believe that angels were created in the beginning and constitute heaven, and that the devil or Satan was an angel of light who became rebellious and was cast out together with his faction, and that this gave rise to hell. . . . in all heaven there is not a single angel who was created as such in the beginning, nor is there in all hell a devil who was created as an angel of light and cast out. Rather, all the people in heaven and in hell are from the human race—in heaven the ones who have lived in heavenly love and faith, and in hell the ones who have lived in hellish love and faith. (*Heaven and Hell* n. 311)

We may gather the magnitude of heaven's pleasure simply from the fact that for everyone there it is delightful to share their pleasure and bliss with someone else; and since everyone in the heavens is like this, we can see how immense heaven's pleasure is. For as I explained above (§268), there is in heaven a sharing by everyone with each individual, and by each individual with everyone. (*Heaven and Hell* n. 399)

Heaven's light is not natural like the light of our world, but spiritual. It actually comes from the Lord as the sun, and that sun, as explained in the preceding chapter, is divine love. While what emanates from the Lord as the sun is called divine truth in the heavens, in essence it is divine good as one with divine truth. This is the source of light and warmth for angels: they get their light from the divine truth and their warmth from the divine good. (*Heaven and Hell* n. 127)

Since heaven's light is divine truth, that light is also divine wisdom and intelligence. Consequently "being raised into heaven's light" means the same thing as "being raised into intelligence and wisdom" and "being enlightened." So

too, light among angels is at exactly the same level as their intelligence and wisdom. Since heaven's light is divine wisdom, people are recognized in heaven's light for what they really are. Everyone's inner nature shines forth from the face just as it is, with nothing whatever concealed. Further, the more internally minded angels love to have everything within them visible because they do not intend anything but what is good. It is different for people who are below heaven and do not intend what is good. They are profoundly afraid of being seen in heaven's light. Remarkably, people in hell look human to each other, but in heaven's light they look like monsters, with frightful faces and bodies, in the exact form of their evil. We have a similar appearance as to our spirits when angels look at us. If we are good, we look like handsome individuals in accord with our goodness; if we are evil we look like monsters, misshapen in accord with our evil. We can see from this that everything is clear in heaven's light. It is clear because heaven's light is divine truth. (*Heaven and Hell* n. 131)

Something now needs to be said about heaven's warmth. In its essence, heaven's warmth is love. It emanates from the Lord as the sun, which is divine love for the Lord and from the Lord, as has been explained in the preceding chapter. We can therefore see that heaven's warmth is just as spiritual as its light, because they come from the same source. There are two things that emanate from the Lord as the sun, divine truth and divine good. Divine truth comes out in heaven as light and divine good as warmth. However, divine truth and divine good are so united that they are not two, but one. For angels, though, they are separated. There are angels who accept divine good more readily than divine truth, and there are angels who accept divine truth more readily than divine good. The ones who are more open to divine good are in the Lord's heavenly kingdom; the ones who are more open to divine truth are in the Lord's spiritual kingdom. The most perfect angels are the ones who are equally open to both. (*Heaven and Hell* n. 133)

when we move from the natural world into the spiritual, which happens when we die, we take with us everything that pertains to our character except our earthly body. In fact, when we enter the spiritual world or our life after death, we are in a body as we were in this world. There seems to be no difference, since we do not feel or see any difference. This body is spiritual, though, so it has been separated or purified from earthly matter. Further, when anything spiritual touches and sees something spiritual, it is just like something natural touching and seeing something natural. So when we have become a spirit, we have no sense that we are not in the body we inhabited in the world, and therefore do not realize that we have died. As "spirit-people," we enjoy every outer and inner sense we enjoyed in the world. We see the way we used to, we hear and talk the way we used to; we smell and taste and feel things when we touch them the way we used to; we want, wish, crave, think, ponder, are moved, love, and intend the way we used to. Studious types still read and write as before. In a word, when we move from the one life into the other, or from the one world into the other, it is like moving from one [physical] place to

another; and we take with us everything we owned as persons to the point that it would be unfair to say that we have lost anything of our own after death, which is only a death of the earthly body. [3] We even take with us our natural memory, since we retain everything we have heard, seen, read, learned, or thought in the world from earliest infancy to the very end of life. (*Heaven and Hell* n. 461)

Heavenly love is loving what is good, honest, and fair because it is good, honest, and fair, and doing it because of that love. This is why they have a life of goodness, honesty, and fairness, which is a heavenly life. If we love these things for their own sakes and do or live them, we are also loving the Lord above all because they come from him. We are also loving our neighbor, because these things are our neighbor who is to be loved. Carnal love, though, is loving what is good and honest and fair not for their own sakes but for our own sake, because we can use them to gain prestige, position, and profit. In this case we are not focusing on the Lord and our neighbor within what is good and honest and fair but on ourselves and the world, and we enjoy deceit. When the motive is deceit, then whatever is good and honest and fair is actually evil and dishonest and unfair. This is what we love within [the outward appearance]. (*Heaven and Hell* n. 481)

There are so many offices and departments in heaven, so many tasks, that there are simply too many to list. There are relatively few in the world. No matter how many people are involved, they are all caught up in a love of their work and tasks out of a love of service—no one out of selfishness or a love of profit. In fact, there is no love of profit for the sake of livelihood, since all the necessities of life are given them gratis. They are housed gratis, clothed gratis, and fed gratis. (*Heaven and Hell* n. 393)

FOR FURTHER READING:

Heaven and Hell.

WEEK IV: THE DOCTRINE OF LIVING I-FAITH

Swedenborg's view of spiritual life is divided into three ideas: faith, charity, and use. In ordinary language this might be called truth, or knowledge, love, and good deeds. These three ideas all take place at the same time in our life. That is, we act on good feelings by means of our know-how. For instance, a parent raises his or her children according to the principles of right and wrong that they know. Though everything a parent does for their children is motivated by love, sometimes know-how leads parents to discipline their children by, perhaps, grounding them for a week-end. This may not look like love, but the goal is to lead the child into good behaviors and choices. And, on the other side, when it comes to Christmas gifts, for instance, know-how tells a parent what things their child particularly likes, and they give accordingly. So good actions require a loving disposition and know-how to implement good will. The good actions are called "uses," the loving feelings are called "charity, and the know-how is called "faith."

These three, faith, charity, and use are discussed as separate topics. But in our life, they all act at the same time. Swedenborg begins his discussion with faith. And, typically, his understanding of faith has nothing in common with that of traditional Christianity.

TRADITIONAL CHRISTIANITY:

For traditional Christianity, faith means believing that Jesus died for our sins. There are other words that go along with the word faith. Those words are: atonement, and justification. The belief that Jesus died for our sins requires a strong separation between Jesus and God. In order for the faith of traditional Christianity to work, Jesus and God pretty much need to be two separate persons.

Traditional Christians believe that God became angry with the human race for all our sins. So God sent His Son into the world to take our sins on Himself. Jesus' death on the cross is considered a sacrifice of atonement. In ancient Israelite society, you could sacrifice an animal at the temple and the sacrifice would take your sins away. Your sins were transferred to the animal, and when the animal was slaughtered your sins died with the animal—so to speak. Jesus' crucifixion is seen in this light. The sins of the whole human race were transferred to Jesus. When Jesus was crucified, our sins were taken away. But this only happens if you believe that it happened. Jesus takes your sins away if you believe that He did. Believing that Jesus took our sins away on the cross is called "faith." And it is this belief that saves a person. When it is articulated strongly, as I once read in a tract someone gave me, all our sins—past, present, and future are taken away by Jesus. No good deeds of our own save us. Only faith that Jesus died for our sins. After Jesus' innocent death on the cross, God became "reconciled" with humans. Jesus is like a go-between, between humans and God. Jesus calms God down and makes God OK with the human race. Acting as a go-between, between God and humanity is called "intercession." Jesus intercedes, that is, pleads our case before God and makes God OK with us.

For those who do not accept Jesus as their personal savior, Jesus does not take away their sins. So everyone who hasn't heard of Jesus, and everyone who doesn't believe Jesus died for their sins are damned to hell. This is why so many Christians are active missionaries. They believe that people who don't know Jesus will go to hell. So they try to

get the word out to as many people as they can so that they have a chance on being saved. This is also the reason why many traditional Christians believe that Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, and Moslems are damned. They do not accept Jesus as their savior. They really believe this. I once applied for an intern position with a Lutheran minister. He seemed like a nice guy and dedicated. In fact, he did some internet research about Swedenborg before we met. He printed up some pages and highlighted some lines. One line he highlighted read, “As the God-Man who lives with us, He is present to save all people, everywhere, whose lives affirm the best they know.” The minister pointed to that line and exclaimed, “I can’t believe that!” For this Lutheran minister, only Jesus saves.

There is some Biblical support for this understanding of faith—mostly from Paul’s Letters. **Galatians 2:15-16** reads as follows:

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law.

There is a lot of room for asking just what Paul means by “works of the law.” But most Protestants interpret this to mean all works—that is, all good deeds. They support this interpretation with **Isaiah 64:6**:

We have all become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth.

And the idea of the atonement can be found in Mark and Matthew 20:28: “the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

SWEDENBORGIAN VIEW:

Swedenborg’s understanding of faith has nothing in common with that of traditional Christianity. For Swedenborg, “faith” means “truth.” Whatever is true is a part of faith. For Swedenborg, indeed, what we believe matters, and what we believe is called faith. But every true principle that we believe is a part of our faith. Faith isn’t believing one doctrine—such as, “Jesus died for our sins.” Rather, faith is everything we hold to be true about everything.

People of a heavenly disposition love what is true, and it is our task on earth to seek out as much truth as we can discover. Learning much truth can lead to “enlightenment” and make us wise. There are people who hate God and spirituality. These people love falsity and deny truth. To get a handle on what truth and falsity are, I will provide a few examples of each:

Truths:

Nice guys find their reward in their heart and in eternal heavenly bliss. Our neighbor’s welfare matters as much as our own. Forgive your neighbor not 7 times, but 70 times 7. The universe was created by a God who loves every individual more than we can imagine. God is all good, and our task is to learn as much as we can about how to be good. Accept the good things that God gives us, and be content in God’s guidance and care. Do good to others because it is good and you love what is good. Evidence for God can be seen

everywhere if a person begins with the belief that there is a God. Life is glorious and we live forever.

Falsities:

Nice guys finish last. Look out for number one first. Don't get mad, get even. There is no God. There is no right and wrong except what I make right or wrong. I want what I want when I want it. I want to have it all. I am all that matters. What's in it for me? I believe only what science can prove. Life sucks and then you die.

So faith means truths that teach us how to be good. The more truths we learn, the more wisdom we have. By learning truths and becoming wise, we will know what God's will is and we will more and more be able to live a loving life—thus a heavenly life.

We find truth everywhere. Especially in the Bible. But also in conversations with other people, in stories that we read, and also through life experience.

Thus for Swedenborg, faith shows us how to live. Faith is not holding a belief that takes away sins. It is a set of directions that show us how to live a good life.

Since faith is a set of directions about how to be good, any teaching that points us in the direction of goodness can be faith. This means that any religion's teachings about what is good can work. If a religion points an individual in the direction of a good life, it gives its followers all they need to come into heaven. So all faiths can save. Swedenborg's view is that every person who is practicing their religion as best they know can be saved.

We can see, now how different Swedenborg's view of faith is from that of traditional Protestant religion. Protestants do not emphasize doing good deeds, indeed, being a good person. Faith alone matters for most Protestants. For Swedenborg, the whole thing about faith is teaching us how to be good. Then we need to actually do good, which is the subject of the next lesson on charity.

There is a ton of Biblical support that we need to do good in order to be spiritual people and come into heaven. Just some of the many, many Bible passages about being good are these:

Matthew 7:19: Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

John 13:34: I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

John 15:12-14: This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.

John 15:5: I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit,

Mark 12:28-31: One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Galatians 5:14: For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Galatians 5:16, 19-25: Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. . . Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Yet faith in its essence is truth. Faith is truth in its own light. Therefore as truth is something that we can acquire, so is faith. We can all turn to the Lord if we want to. We can all gather truths from the Word if we want to. Every truth that is in the Word, or from the Word, shines; and faith is truth in light. The Lord, who is light itself, flows into us all. If we have truths from the Word, he makes them shine in us and become part of our faith. (*True Christian Religion* n. 349)

FOR FURTHER READING:

True Christian Religion nos. 336-458 (Ch. VI-VII).

WEEK V: THE DOCTRINE OF LIVING II-CHARITY

The idea of charity is different between Catholics and Protestants. So we can't talk about charity only according to traditional Christianity, since traditional Christianity is both Catholic and Protestant. Since it is the most ancient, we will begin our discussion of charity with the Catholic view.

TRADITIONAL CHRISTIANITY:

Catholic view: The Catholic view of charity teaches that our good deeds contribute to our salvation. When we do good works, we get "grace." Grace is what gets us into heaven. Grace transform us from a merely natural person into a spiritual person. Some of the good works that we need to do to get grace are:

- 1) Going to church
- 2) Going to confession
- 3) Taking holy communion
- 4) Saying prayers
- 5) Doing deeds of charity

The idea here is that we "earn" grace by doing certain holy deeds. Among these deeds is charity.

For Catholics, and, in fact, for Protestants, too, charity is doing good for the needy. So charity means giving to the poor, creating soup kitchens, founding hospitals, visiting prisoners, and the like. This view of charity is expressed in Matthew 25:35-36,

I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.

Protestant view: While Protestants agree with Catholics about what Charity is, they disagree about how charity works. Protestants are very suspicious of good works. They claim that good deeds do nothing for our salvation. We do not earn salvation by doing good deeds. We are saved by faith alone. Faith means belief that Jesus bore our sins on the cross and took them away. Protestants are suspicious of the Catholic view of grace because the Catholic Church really took advantage of the idea of grace. Catholics thought that saints and the bones of saints could give grace, and they thought that the Church could sell these commodities. One of the main complaints of Protestants was the idea of indulgences. In the middle ages, Catholics sold indulgences, which were assurances that your deceased ancestors could be released from purgatory. In other words, if you paid the Church money, your ancestor would be released from purgatory. Protestants thought that this was an outrage, and denied the whole idea of earning grace by good works.

SWEDENBORGIAN VIEW:

Swedenborg's view of charity is more of a psychological state of mind. For Swedenborg, charity means acting from love in all the activities of life. It means being sincere in friendships, honest and faithful at work, wishing well to everyone, being just in judgements, and turning away from harmful and bad things. While faith is thinking true thoughts, charity is feeling good feelings. It is wishing well to everyone from the heart. It is summed up in Jesus' words in **John 13:34-35**:

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

The Latin word for charity is *caritas*. Can you see the English word "care" in this Latin word? Charity means care, caring about others.

Charity includes doing our jobs. When we do our job, society is served. And society is our neighbor as a group. Think what a gift to society a mechanic gives. By keeping our cars maintained, we are all able to go and do our own service. Teachers give society knowledge that we can use to make our lives better. Philosophers used to give us principles we can live by and ethics to make us good people. Now, perhaps, psychologists do this. Ministers create environments in which people can open up and encounter God. Also they give us truths about God and spirituality that we can apply to life. Accountants help to keep money flowing accurately. What I am getting at here is explaining how each job is service to the neighbor, and thus is a form of charity.

For Swedenborg, love means sharing in others' joy. It is feeling happy when other people are happy. It is wanting to render others happy from our own abilities, feeling joy in the joy of the others. So for Swedenborg, charity is caring, loving, and feeling joy when other people are happy.

For Swedenborg, love for the neighbor also requires know-how, or truth. Loving the neighbor is tied to loving God. God is good, is everything good. So loving God means loving what is good. This translates into loving the neighbor by looking at the neighbor's qualities. For Swedenborg, loving what is good in the neighbor is the spiritual way to love. It isn't loving just the person, it is loving the good qualities in the person. So we wouldn't form attachments indiscriminately to everyone. Rather it is finding good qualities in the neighbor, and nurturing and uniting with the good qualities.

Swedenborg writes about charity all through his writings:

Charity itself is acting justly and faithfully in the office, business, and employment in which a man is engaged, because all that such a man does is of use to society, and use is good; and good in a sense abstracted from person is the neighbor (That not a single man only, but also a lesser community, and even a man's country, is the neighbor, has been shown above.) Take, for example, a king who sets his subjects an example of well-doing, who wishes them to live according to the laws of justice, rewards those who so live, regards everyone according to his merits, protects his subjects against injury and invasion, acts the part of a father to his kingdom, and consults the general prosperity of his people; in his heart there is charity, and his deeds are good works. The priest who teaches truth from the Word, and thereby leads to good of life, and so to heaven, because he consults the good of the souls of those of

his church, is eminently in the exercise of charity. The judge who judges according to law and justice, and not for reward, friendship and relationship, consults the good of society and of each individual; of society because it is thereby kept in obedience to law and in the fear of transgressing it; and of the individual because justice thereby triumphs over injustice. The merchant who acts from honesty and not from deceit, consults the good of his neighbor with whom he has business. It is the same with a common or skilled workman, if he does his work rightly and honestly, and not fraudulently and deceitfully. It is the same with all others, as with captains and sailors, with farmers and servants (*True Christian Religion* n. 422).

This is charity itself, because charity may be defined as doing good to the neighbor daily and continually, not only to the neighbor individually, but also to the neighbor collectively; and this can be done only through what is good and just in the office, business, and employment in which a man is engaged, and with those with whom he has any dealings; for this is one's daily work, and when he is not doing it it still occupies his mind continually, and he has it in thought and intention. The man who thus practices charity, becomes more and more charity in form; for justice and fidelity form his mind, and the practice of these forms his body; and because of his form he gradually comes to will and think only such things as pertain to charity. Such at length come to be like those of whom it is said in the Word, that they have the law written on their hearts. Nor do they place merit in their works, because they do not think of merit but of duty, - that it becomes a citizen so to act. But a man can by no means of himself act from spiritual justice and fidelity; for every man inherits from his parents a disposition to do what is good and just for the sake of himself and the world; but no man inherits a disposition to do it for the sake of what is good and just; consequently, only he who worships the Lord, and acts from Him when acting from himself, attains to spiritual charity, and becomes imbued with it by the practice of it (*True Christian Religion* n. 423).

The essence of God consists of two things, love and wisdom; while the essence of His love consists of three things, namely, to love others outside of Himself, to desire to be one with them, and from Himself to render them blessed (*True Christian Religion* n. 43).

WEEK VI: THE DOCTRINE OF LIVING-USES

For Swedenborg, love acting through truth in good deeds, deeds of love and service to our fellows is the goal of spirituality. The deeds of loving service are called “uses.” The word means being useful. And being useful means serving our fellows. But uses are also all deeds of love that we express intelligently. Uses can be making a painting, or playing music, or knitting a blanket or sweater, or playing sports. Of course uses are jobs that we love to do.

Swedenborg has a foot in both Protestant and Catholic belief systems. Like Catholics, Swedenborg wants us to do good works, or deeds of charity. He wants us to identify shortcoming in our character and overcome them. He wants us to perform our jobs honestly. He wants us to be good to other people and ourselves. But like Protestants, he does not want us to feel that we deserve heaven because we have earned it by our good works. He doesn’t want us to take credit for our good deeds.

In order for a good deed to be spiritually good, we don’t want to gain anything by doing it. We don’t do good so that we can brag of it. We don’t do good with the intention of getting rich and famous. Spiritual good is doing good because it is good, and we love what is good. We do good for its own sake. There is no thought of gain of any kind—reputation, wealth, credit, to get paid back. Good is done because it is simply the right thing to do.

His solution to this problem takes us into the depths of Swedenborgian mysticism. The solution to this problem of how to do good deeds without taking credit for them is the concept, “as if of self.” We do good as if we were doing it by our own power. All the while, we acknowledge that God gives us the power to do the good. So it really isn’t ourselves doing the good, but God, acting through us, that does the good. So we can’t take credit for it. Swedenborg comes us with a metaphor that explains how this doctrine works. It is like a servant who gets dirty from his or her work and wants to be cleaned. So the servant goes to the master and asks to be cleaned. The master says, “Here is water, soap, and a towel—wash yourself.” The key elements are all in this story. First, and most important, it is the master who gives the water and soap. So the power to cleanse him or herself is from the master. But the servant has to do the actual work of cleaning themselves. So God gives us the power to find spiritual life, but we have to act “as if” we are doing it all ourselves.

Now we are coming to the mystical Swedenborg. For even though it looks like we are doing good and turning away from bad things, it is really God-in-us that is doing it all. Think about your heartbeat. Can you stop it or start it whenever you want to? When you get injured and your body heals itself,—can you start or stop your body from healing? Of course we can cooperate with the healing process, such as cleaning a wound and putting a bandage on it. But once we do that, our body heals itself without any willpower of our own. Or does it? Isn’t there a life-force in us that makes our bodies do all these and countless other miraculous chemical reactions? Isn’t God in our souls and giving life to us? Without this life-force in us, without God in us, we would fall down dead in an instant.

This is the case with good deeds, also. God is good. Everything good is God-given. Everything good is from the Source of all Good. When we have good-will in our hearts, we have God in our hearts. And it is the God in our hearts that is doing the good. So when we do good, a real union takes place between God and us. God and we together are doing good.

There is Biblical support for this view of good works. A very clear statement of this doctrine is in **Philippians 2:12-13**:

continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

The **Gospel of John**, the most mystical Gospel, also has a clear statement of this doctrine, Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing (15:4-5).

Some people don't like this idea. They can't imagine that the hard work that they do, and the accomplishments that they achieve are not the product of their own effort. We want to pride ourselves in what we do. But, in fact, it is really our ego that wants all the credit for the good we do.

Really, this way of viewing good deeds is how we love God. When we love God, we thank God for giving us the opportunity and power to join with God in the creation of beauty in the world.

It is damaging for us to take credit for things we do for the sake of our salvation. Hidden within our credit-taking there are evil attitudes of which we are unaware at the time: denial that God flows in and works in us; confidence in our own power in regard to salvation; faith in ourselves and not in God; [the delusion that] we justify and save ourselves by our own strength; contempt for divine grace and mercy; rejection of reformation and regeneration by divine means; and especially disregard for the merit and justice of the Lord God our Savior, which we then claim as our own. In our taking credit there is also a continual focus on our own reward and perception of it as our first and last goal, a stifling and an extinction of love for the Lord and love for our neighbor, and total ignorance and unawareness of the pleasure involved in heavenly love (which takes no credit), while all we feel is our love for ourselves (*True Christian Religion* n. 439).

if we believe that everything truly good comes from the Lord, we do not take credit for what we do. The more developed this faith becomes in us, the more the Lord takes away our fantasies about getting credit for what we have done. In this state we can practice goodwill abundantly without a fear of taking credit. Eventually we sense the spiritual pleasure in goodwill. Then we become averse to taking credit because doing so is damaging to our life. It is easy for the Lord to erase people's idea that they deserve credit, provided those people attain goodwill primarily through working justly and faithfully in the position, business, or line of work they are in and with the people with whom they interact (*True Christian Religion* n. 442).

WEEK VII: THE DIVINE MARRIAGE

The principles behind Swedenborg's concept of marriage are cosmic. They are grounded in creation itself, and ultimately in God's own Being. A note for contemporary readers is in order. Swedenborg wrote in the 18th century, and LGBTQ issues were not in public discourse. There are only 2 times in Swedenborg's 30 volumes when he even alludes to LGBTQ issues, and then it is only in passing. So in discussing marriage issues, Swedenborg is exclusively heterosexual. But when he talks about marriage principles in a cosmic way, the possibility of application to LGBTQ issues is possible.

Marriage begins in the Divine Marriage principle in God Himself. God is the perfect marriage of Love and Wisdom. We talk about love and wisdom as if they are two things. But in action, they are totally united. As we saw in the lesson on faith and charity, faith and charity are united in good works. In God, Love and Wisdom are one God. Only in discussion do we divide them into two. Love and Wisdom, show themselves in good deeds and true ideas, or in us as loving feelings and true thoughts. This is the Divined Marriage principle—Love and Wisdom totally unified.

In heaven, God appears as the sun. Consider: what 2 major qualities shine out from the sun? We get heat and light from the sun. In God as the spiritual sun, love as heat and light as wisdom shine forth into the whole created universe. Our very capacity to love and think flow into us from God's heat and light. Without God flowing into us, we would not be able to love or think true thoughts. Here again, we confront Swedenborg's mysticism. We are united to God when we act on the love and wisdom that flows into us by doing good deeds according to true principles. And this is God-in-us. Our capacity to love and think are not our own. They are God's in us.

God is also united with the human race. The metaphor for this union is marriage. We are the bride and God is the husband. This metaphor is in the prophets Hosea and Jeremiah, it is scattered through the Gospels, and all over the place in Revelation. The marriage symbolism is a way of talking about God's love and wisdom being in us, and our union with God by means of it. In Catholicism, nuns are married to Jesus, and, I believe, actually wear wedding rings.

This cosmic wedding principle created human marriages. The love and wisdom of God finds a form in woman and man. In general, women symbolize the love aspect of God and men symbolize the wisdom aspect of God. It needs to be said that both women and men both have love and wisdom principles in them. When woman and man come together in human marriages, the cosmic love and wisdom union is realized in the human realm. Since God's union with the human race—the mystical marriage—is eternal, so in Catholicism, marriages are eternal. That is why Catholics do not allow divorce. They take the symbolism of the divine marriage with humanity seriously. And they make human marriages reflect the eternal character of the divine marriage.

This brings up a word that I think society has forgotten: chastity. The traditional meaning for chastity is the vow to give up marriage that priests, monks, and nuns take. It traditionally means taking a vow of celibacy, a vow to give up marriage. But for Swedenborg, chastity means devotion to one beloved. It means the faithfulness of marital fidelity. Only people who are married are chaste, not people who give up marriage.

But Catholics, and most traditional Christians say that marriage ends upon death. In heaven, humans are no longer joined in marriage—everybody is single. In Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, in *Paradiso*, that is, in heaven, all the people are celibate—single. The *Divine Comedy* is all about the couple Dante and Beatrice. Beatrice leads Dante through hell, purgatory, and heaven. And when they finally get to the highest level in heaven, they each are united mystically with God, and separate from each other.

Here Swedenborg differs from traditional Christianity. For Swedenborg, couples remain united in heaven. The heavenly, or cosmic marriage is based on the spiritual union of love and wisdom. This cosmic marriage is all through the created universe, including heaven. So the same marriage principle that brings woman and man together in this world persists in the next. Women and men are married in the next life and enjoy everything there that they enjoyed here on earth—everything. Since heaven is a continuation of life here, and since we have spiritual bodies there, physical expression of marital love occurs in heaven, too.

What is remarkable for a male Christian in the 18th century is that Swedenborg insists on absolute equality between the sexes. Recall our discussion on heaven and hell. The principle love of hell is a love of controlling, or dominating. Love is destroyed when one person tries to control another. The person being controlled feels anger and resentment to the person controlling them. This is especially the case in marriage. No one can control the other one, or love dies.

Some Biblical support for the Divine Marriage principle are the following:

Revelation 9:6-9: Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying out,

“Hallelujah!

For the Lord our God

the Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and exult

and give him the glory,

for the marriage of the Lamb has come,

and his bride has made herself ready;

to her it has been granted to be clothed

with fine linen, bright and pure”—

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”

Jeremiah 31:31-32: The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband,^[a] says the LORD.

Hosea 2:16-20: On that day, says the LORD, you will call me, "My husband," and no longer will you call me, "My Baal." For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more. . . . And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. ²⁰ I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the LORD.

Revelation 21:1-2, 9-10: Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. . . . Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And in the spirit^[f] he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

Matthew 25:1: Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.

Mark 2:18-19: Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and people^l came and said to him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" Jesus said to them, "The wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.

Genesis 1:26-28: Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

So God created humankind^[e] in his image,
in the image of God he created them;^[f]
male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply,

Genesis 2:21-25: So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called Woman,
for out of Man this one was taken."

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

The Divine Marriage principle can be found everywhere throughout Swedenborg's writings:

The true divine essence is love and wisdom. If you gather together everything you know, focus your mind's insight on it, and look through it carefully from some spiritual height to discover what is common to everything, the only conclusion you can draw is that it is love and wisdom. These two are essential to every aspect of our life. Everything we deal with that is civic, everything moral, and everything spiritual depends on these two things. Apart from them, there is nothing. The

No one can deny that in God we find love and wisdom together in their very essence. He loves us all out of the love that is within him, and he guides us all out of the wisdom that is within him (*Divine Love and Wisdom* n. 28, 29).

All human feelings and thoughts arise from the divine love and wisdom that constitute the very essence that is God. The feelings arise from divine love and the thoughts from divine wisdom. Further, every single bit of our being is nothing but feeling and thought. These two are like the springs of everything that is alive in us. They are the source of all our life experiences of delight and enchantment, the delight from the prompting of our love and the enchantment from our consequent thought. Since we have been created to be recipients, then, and since we are recipients to the extent that we love God and are wise because of our love for God (that is, the extent to which we are moved by what comes from God and think as a result of that feeling), it therefore follows that the divine essence, the Creatress, is divine love and wisdom (*Divine Love and Wisdom* n. 33).

In the spiritual world, divine love and wisdom look like a sun. There are two worlds, one spiritual and one physical; and the spiritual world does not derive anything from the physical one, nor does the physical one derive anything from the spiritual one. They are completely distinct from each other, communicating only by means of correspondence, whose nature has been amply explained elsewhere.⁶⁴ The following example may be enlightening. Warmth in the physical world is the equivalent of the good that thoughtfulness does in the spiritual world, and light in the physical world is the equivalent of the truth that faith perceives in the spiritual world (*Divine Love and Wisdom* n. 83).

Warmth and light emanates from the sun that arises from divine love and wisdom. In the spiritual world where angels and spirits live, there is just as much warmth and light as there is in the physical world where we live. The warmth feels just like warmth and the light looks just like light, as well. Still, the warmth and light of the spiritual world and the warmth and light of the physical world are so different that they have nothing in common, as I have already mentioned [§83]. They are as different as life and death. The warmth of the spiritual world is essentially alive, and so is the light; while the warmth of the physical world is essentially dead, and so is the light. The warmth and the light of the spiritual world come from a sun that is nothing but love, while the

warmth and light of the physical world come from a sun that is nothing but fire. Love is alive, and divine love is life itself. Fire is dead, and solar fire is death itself. We may call it that because it has absolutely no life in it (*Divine Love and Wisdom* n. 89).

The Divine that goes forth from the Lord flows chiefly into marriage love because marriage love descends from a conjunction of good and truth; for it is the same thing as has been said above, whether you say conjunction of understanding and will or conjunction of good and truth. Conjunction of good and truth has its origin in the Lord's Divine love towards all who are in heaven and on earth. From Divine love Divine good goes forth, and Divine good is received by angels and men in Divine truths. As truth is the sole receptacle of good nothing can be received from the Lord and from heaven by any one who is not in truths; therefore just to the extent that the truths in man are conjoined to good is man conjoined to the Lord and to heaven. This, then, is the very origin of marriage love, and for this reason that love is the very plane of Divine influx. This shows why the conjunction of good and truth in heaven is called the heavenly marriage, and heaven is likened in the Word to a marriage, and is called a marriage; and the Lord is called the "Bridegroom" and "Husband," and heaven and also the church are called the "bride" and the "wife" (*Heaven and Hell* n. 371).

THE STATES OF THIS LOVE ARE INNOCENCE, PEACE, TRANQUILLITY, INMOST FRIENDSHIP, FULL CONFIDENCE, AND A MUTUAL DESIRE OF MIND AND HEART TO DO EVERY GOOD TO EACH OTHER; AND THE STATES DERIVED FROM THESE ARE BLESSEDNESS, SATISFACTION, DELIGHT AND PLEASURE; AND FROM THE ETERNAL ENJOYMENT OF THESE IS DERIVED HEAVENLY FELICITY. All these things are in marital love, and thence are derived from it, because its origin is from the marriage of good and truth, and this marriage is from the Lord; and because love is of such a nature, that it desires to communicate with another, whom it loves from the heart, yea, confer joys upon him, and thence to derive its own joys. This therefore is the case in an infinitely high degree with the divine love, which is in the Lord, in regard to man, whom he created a receptacle of both love and wisdom proceeding from himself; and as he created people for the reception of those principles, the man for the reception of wisdom, and the woman for the reception of the love of the man's wisdom, therefore from inmost principles he infused into people marital love into which love he might insinuate all things blessed, satisfactory, delightful, and pleasant, which proceed solely from his divine love through his divine wisdom, together with life, and flow into their recipients; consequently, which flow into those who are principled in love truly marital; for these alone are recipients. Mention is made of innocence, peace, tranquillity, inmost friendship, full confidence, and the mutual desire of doing every good to each other; for innocence and peace relate to the soul, tranquillity to the mind, inmost friendship to the breast, full confidence to the heart, and the mutual desire of doing every good to each other, to the body as derived from the former principles (*Marital Love [Conjugal Love]* n. 180).

The love of dominion of one over the other entirely takes away marriage love and its heavenly delight, for as has been said above, marriage love and its delight consists in the will of one being that of the other, and this mutually and reciprocally. This is destroyed by love of dominion in marriage, since he that domineers wishes his will alone to be in the other, and nothing of the other's will to be reciprocally in himself, which destroys all mutuality, and thus all sharing of any love and its delight one with the other. And yet this sharing and consequent conjunction are the interior delight itself that is called blessedness in marriage. This blessedness, with everything that is heavenly and spiritual in marriage love, is so completely extinguished by love of dominion as to destroy even all knowledge of it; and if that love were referred to it would be held in such contempt that any mention of blessedness from that source would excite either laughter or anger (*Heaven and Hell* n. 380).

FOR FURTHER READING:

Marital Love (Conjugal love)

WEEK VIII: REGENERATION (REBIRTH)

Swedenborg's understanding about spiritual rebirth, or "regeneration" as he calls it, has some parallels with traditional Christianity. Regeneration means rebirth in Latin—re-generation. Most Christians agree that some form of rebirth is necessary. Jesus says this in John 3:3, "Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."" In some Christian faiths, rebirth is called "sanctification." What brings about the sanctification is "sanctifying grace." In other Christian denominations, faith gives a person new life in Christ. And in Evangelical Christianity, a person is instantly reborn when he or she accepts Jesus as their personal Savior.

For Swedenborg, regeneration is a process. And it involves real personality transformation. We become different people. Changing who we are clearly can't happen instantly. Regeneration takes a lifetime and even continues into the next life. Swedenborg divides this process into 3 stages: repentance, reformation, regeneration.

The process of repentance, reformation, and regeneration has a basic pattern that we go through with individual variations. In general, the process is moving from being a natural person to becoming a spiritual person. By natural, we mean the self that we are given at birth, given by nature. It can be called our biological or worldly self. We need to become a spiritual person. The Latin root of the word "spiritual," is *inspirare*, or *spiritus*. In Latin, *spiritus* or *inspirare* breath, breathing, inspire, breathe into, excite, inflame, instill or plant, and blowing wind. Think about the Christian term Holy Spirit—Holy Breath. If the Holy Spirit breathes into us, excites us, inspires us, instills God's love in us, then we will be spiritual people. Basically we start out life oriented to self and the world.

The process begins with repentance. Repentance is seeing some character defect, or sin, in ourselves. Traditional Christians call this "prevenient grace." For Swedenborg, sin can be called anything that blocks love. It is anything that prevents the inflow of God's Holy Spirit. In order to know what direction we want to go in, we need to know what the good life is. So the repentance process requires knowledge, or truth. This is where faith comes in. Recall that faith is truth of all kinds. The more truth we know, the more we see how our life can be better and the more we see where we don't match up to heavenly principles. I heard a Calvinist minister use the metaphor as if God were shining a flashlight on our souls, illuminating our shortcomings.

What comes between us and God's Holy Spirit are chiefly putting ourselves first and being intolerant of other people. Ego means edging-God-out. A sub-class of this is wanting to take everything in the world to ourselves, to own everything, to have it all. Another good measure of spirituality is to compare our lives to the 10 Commandments.

When we see something that needs to be changed in our lives, we begin the process of reformation. We re-form who we are. Paul talks about this process as dying to the desires of the flesh and living in the Spirit:

Galatians 5:13-25:

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh^[a]; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you bite and devour each other, watch out or

you will be destroyed by each other. So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

This process of reforming ourselves takes a whole lifetime and is difficult. We want to keep our old habits, even if they are self-destructive, neurotic, maladapted, and sinful. Old habits die hard. This also means ways of viewing the world. When I was in school, they taught me that life was meaningless and that there was no higher life beyond the world we experience day-to-day. We were taught to embrace “existential despair.” When I entered a 12-step program, I was taught that I needed a positive world-view. I was taught to live in solutions, not problems. Over a few years, I changed the way I saw life. I embraced the sunshine, I found good in things, I left behind my despair and found joy and happiness in the little and great things in life. This was a process of reformation of my thoughts and attitudes.

We need to turn upside down spiritually. We start with self, first; we end with God first and our neighbors first. We start with craving for worldly gains; we end with loving heavenly riches.

Now we are at the regeneration part of rebirth. When the process is complete, we spontaneously act from spiritual love. The struggle is over. Our hearts are now aligned with God; our loves are heavenly; we desire only what is good. It is as Dante writes in the XXXIII Canto of *Paradiso*:

But by now my desire and will were turned,
Like a balanced wheel rotated evenly,
By the Love that moves the sun and the other stars.

We are not at war with ourselves anymore. Evil influences go away, and angels surround us. It is the final stage in our spirituality. Confucius describes this process beautifully, The Master said, “At fifteen I set my heart upon learning. At thirty, I had planted my feet firm upon the ground. At forty, I no longer suffered from perplexities. At fifty, I knew what were the biddings of Heaven. At sixty, I heard them with docile ear. At seventy, I could follow the dictates of my own heart; for what I desired no longer overstepped the boundaries of right (*Analects* 2.4).

Some of Swedenborg’s own words in this subject are the following:

There are two states that man must enter upon and pass through, when from being natural he is becoming spiritual. The first state is called

Reformation, and the second Regeneration. In the first man looks from his natural to his spiritual state and longs for that state; in the second state he becomes spiritual-natural. The first state is formed by means of truths, which must be truths of faith, and through these he looks to charity; the second state is formed by means of the goods of charity, and by these he enters into the truths of faith. Or what is the same, the first is a state of thought from the understanding, and the second a state of love from the will (*True Christian Religion* n. 571).

Every man may be regenerated, each according to his state; for the simple and the learned are regenerated differently; as are those engaged in different pursuits, and those who fill different offices; those who search into the external things of the Word, and those who search into its internals; those who are principled in natural good from their parents, and those who are in evil; those who from their infancy have entered into the vanities of the world, and those who sooner or later have withdrawn from them; in a word, those who constitute the Lord's external church are regenerated differently from those who constitute His internal church, and this variety, like that of men's features and dispositions, is infinite; and yet everyone, according to his state, may be regenerated and saved (*True Christian Religion* n. 580).

A CONFLICT ARISES BETWEEN THE INTERNAL AND THE EXTERNAL MAN, AND THEN THE ONE THAT CONQUERS RULES OVER THE OTHER. A conflict then arises because the internal man is reformed by means of truths; and from truths he sees what is evil and false, which evil and falsity are still in the external or natural man; consequently disagreement first springs up between the new will, which is above, and the old will, which is below; and as the disagreement is between the two wills, it is also between their delights; for the flesh, it is well known, is opposed to the spirit and the spirit to the flesh, and the flesh with its lusts must be subdued before the spirit can act and man become new. After this disagreement of the two wills a conflict arises; and this is called spiritual temptation (*True Christian Religion* n. 596).

Another reason why the celestial man is the Sabbath or rest is that conflict ceases when he becomes celestial. Evil spirits withdraw and good spirits approach, as do celestial angels. When these are present evil spirits cannot possibly be present too, but flee far away. And because it was not the person himself who fought but the Lord alone on his behalf, it is said that 'the Lord rested' (*Arcana Coelestia* n. 87).

But what these things involve cannot possibly be perceived unless it is known what man's state is while from being spiritual he is becoming celestial, for they are deeply hidden. While he is spiritual, the external man is not yet willing to yield obedience to and serve the internal, and therefore there is a combat; but when he becomes celestial, then the external man begins to obey and serve the internal, and therefore the combat ceases, and tranquility ensues (*Arcana Coelestia* n. 91).

WEEK IX: THE BIBLE

We have talked about truth, and the need for truth to guide us in our spiritual journey. But the question arises, “Where do we find truth?” One of the principal sources of truth is the Bible.

The Bible is a difficult book to deal with. There are passages in it that reasonable people will most likely reject. There are passages that say God calls for genocide; there are passages in which God calls for the murder of innocent children and civilians in total war scenarios; there are passages that say God is angry, vengeful, punishing, and motivated by racial preference. We denounce these actions when humans do them. How could God do them? Then there are passages that are clearly untrue or fanciful. The Bible says that the world was created in 7 days, which conflicts with the scientific theory that the world was created over billions of years. Then there are contradictions in the Bible. The book of Joshua says that Canaan was conquered by a series of lightning strikes led by Joshua. But the book of Judges says that many tribes were left in Canaan and that the Israelites lived side-by-side with them for centuries.

In the Swedenborgian understanding of the Bible there are 2 levels of meaning in the Bible: the literal sense, and the internal sense. The literal sense is the Bible stories, lessons, and teachings as the Bible presents them. The literal sense is just that, the literal words in the Bible.

I stress what the literal sense is, because for Swedenborg there is another level to the Bible. There is an inner sense, an inner meaning to the Bible beneath the literal sense. When we look at the Bible as having an inner sense, we see it as a system of symbols. The symbols of the Bible are called “correspondences.” A given symbol “corresponds” to a deeper spiritual reality. So when we look at the Bible as a system of symbols, we look past the literal sense.

When we see the Bible as a set of symbols, when light is mentioned in it, we think of truth and **enlightenment**. When heat is mentioned, we think of love. When fruit trees are mentioned, we think of good deeds, as in bearing fruit. The wars in the Bible signify spiritual wars that go on inside a person’s soul during the reformation process. The tribes in Canaan represent specific evils in us that we want to conquer. Entering the Holy Land and purging it of the native tribes represents our regeneration and making our characters spiritual. The stars represent heaven. Numbers, too, have symbolic meaning. 40 represents temptation and spiritual struggle. So in the story of Noah’s ark, it rained for 40 days and 40 nights. The Israelites wandered for 40 years in the wilderness before coming into the Holy Land. Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days when He was tempted by the devil. 7 means holiness. So on the 7th day of creation, God rests. Noah is told to take 7 pairs of clean animals into the ark. When Jesus is asked how many times to forgive, the questioner asks whether we are to forgive 7 times? Jesus replies that we are to forgive 7 x 70. 12 signifies complete spiritual attainment. So there are 12 tribes of Israel, 12 Apostles, there were 12 baskets of scraps left over after Jesus fed the 5,000.

The Bible is said to be like a person wearing a jacket. The hands and face are exposed but the torso and arms are covered. This means that everything we need for salvation is clearly stated in the literal sense, like the bare face and hands. But the deeper truths of faith are covered by symbolic language, like the torso and arms. So the 10 Commandments are

written in plain words we can all understand literally. The 2 great commands—to love God and the neighbor—are in plain language we can all understand literally.

The language that the Bible is written in is a special language. It is not the language of any other human language. There is a spiritual depth to the Biblical language. Angels also have the Bible.

The Bible ultimately goes back to God as its Source. In fact, Swedenborg claims that the Bible is God in print. The Bible is like God's body. As such, the Bible is divine truth.

So when we read the Bible, we are connecting our minds with the angels of heaven and with God Himself. When we read the Bible in a spiritual frame of mind, we will feel our hearts warmed by spiritual love, we will feel peace in our minds, and perhaps insights into our life's problems. This is because of the spiritual origins of the Bible and the language it is written in. Its symbolic language fills our mind with spiritual imagery that brings angels close to us and God close to us.

Though we speak of an internal level to the Bible, Swedenborg claims that the power of the Bible is in the literal level. When we read the Bible, it is not appropriate to try to mentally translate the literal imagery into its spiritual meaning. We connect with God when we read the stories as written. Then the imagery in our minds connects with the higher spiritual presences and brings heaven to earth.

Swedenborg claims that his theology is derived from the inner sense of the Bible. He wrote many volumes explaining the first two books of the Bible and the book of Revelation verse by verse and phrase by phrase. As an example of this process, I will present his interpretation of the creation story. The 7 days of creation represent 7 stages in our spiritual rebirth (regeneration).

The six days, or periods, which are so many successive states of the regeneration of man, are in general as follows.

The first state is that which precedes, including both the state from infancy, and that immediately before regeneration. This is called a "void," "emptiness," and "thick darkness." And the first motion, which is the Lord's mercy, is "the spirit of God moving upon the faces of the waters."

The second state is when a distinction is made between those things which are of the Lord, and those which are proper to man. The things which are of the Lord are called in the word "remains," and here are especially knowledges of faith, which have been learned from infancy, and which are stored up, and are not manifested until the man comes into this state. At the present day this state seldom exists without temptation, misfortune, or sorrow, by which the things of the body and the world, that is, such as are proper to man, are brought into quiescence, and as it were die. Thus the things which belong to the external man are separated from those which belong to the internal man. In the internal man are the remains, stored up by the Lord unto this time, and for this use.

The third state is that of repentance, in which the man, from his internal man, speaks piously and devoutly, and brings forth goods, like

works of charity, but which nevertheless are inanimate, because he thinks they are from himself. These goods are called the "tender grass," and also the "herb yielding seed," and afterwards the "tree bearing fruit."

The fourth state is when the man becomes affected with love, and illuminated by faith. He indeed previously discoursed piously, and brought forth goods, but he did so in consequence of the temptation and straitness under which he labored, and not from faith and charity; wherefore faith and charity are now enkindled in his internal man, and are called two "luminaries."

The fifth state is when the man discourses from faith, and thereby confirms himself in truth and good: the things then produced by him are animate, and are called the "fish of the sea," and the "birds of the heavens."

The sixth state is when, from faith, and thence from love, he speaks what is true, and does what is good: the things which he then brings forth are called the "living soul" and the "beast." And as he then begins to act at once and together from both faith and love, he becomes a spiritual man, who is called an "image." His spiritual life is delighted and sustained by such things as belong to the knowledges of faith, and to works of charity, which are called his "food"; and his natural life is delighted and sustained by those which belong to the body and the senses; whence a combat arises, until love gains the dominion, and he becomes a celestial man.

Those who are being regenerated do not all arrive at this state. The greatest part, at this day, attain only the first state; some only the second; others the third, fourth, or fifth; few the sixth; and scarcely anyone the seventh. (*Arcana Coelestia* n. 6-13)

The celestial man is the seventh day, on which the Lord rests. (*AC* n. 74)

Another reason why the celestial man is the "sabbath," or "rest," is that combat ceases when he becomes celestial. The evil spirits retire, and good ones approach, as well as celestial angels; and when these are present, evil spirits cannot possibly remain, but flee far away. And since it was not the man himself who carried on the combat, but the Lord alone for the man, it is said that the Lord "rested." (*Arcana Coelestia* n. 87)

When the spiritual man becomes celestial, he is called the "work of God," because the Lord alone has fought for him, and has created, formed, and made him; and therefore it is here said, "God finished his work on the seventh day"; and twice, that "he rested from all his work." (*AC* n. 88)

WEEK X: THE DEPTHS OF THE SELF

Psychologists talk of deeper parts to our personality below what we are aware of. Some call our deeper realms “sub-conscious,” or “unconscious,” or “collective unconscious.” However it is called, many schools of psychology think that there is more to the self than we are aware of.

Swedenborg thought the same. In Swedenborg’s system, there are basically 3 levels to the self: natural, spiritual, and celestial. The natural level is the level that we receive from nature. It is ourselves formed for life in the natural world. This is the self we are aware of. It includes our body, our mind, and our emotions. The spiritual level is above our natural level, and more internal to our personality. It is a part of our personality that is of the other world. And there is a yet higher and more inward level to our personalities. The highest level of our personalities is called celestial.

At first, our higher and inner levels of personality are dormant. But as we progress spiritually, the higher levels of our mind begin to sprout, grow, blossom, and open up.

The spiritual influences that come to us from angels and from God flow through the spiritual and celestial levels of our mind. We are spirits in the material world. Our souls are in the spiritual world even while we are on the earth. We are just not conscious of it. People in heaven live in communities. And our souls reside in communities of like-minded angels or demons.

There are 3 general levels to heaven, which correspond to the 3 levels of our personality. The natural level is where good people go who are oriented to the world and have no special interest in spiritual realities. The spiritual level is where love for truth predominates. And the celestial level is where love predominates. Since we are in heaven depending on our state of mind and heart, the three levels of heaven are also the three levels of our mind. When the several levels become open in our mind, our souls are then residing in that level in heaven.

As we go through the process of repentance, reformation, and regeneration our soul is elevated up through the degrees in heaven. We begin on the lower levels of heaven, the natural heaven. As we learn truths, and begin to see how we can serve society and others, we open the spiritual level of our mind. This is a level in which truth predominates. We act from the truths we know and love to learn more and more truths. Then our souls are lifted up into the spiritual heaven and is surrounded by angels of that level. When we act from love, love for God and our neighbors, love instead of truth, we open the highest level of our souls. Then our souls live in communities in the highest heaven. So the process of regeneration is also a process of opening, or enlightening our minds, and elevating our souls into higher and higher heavenly communities.

God is continually flowing into us, into our thinking and into our feelings. God is ever lifting our minds and hearts into higher and higher heavens. As we open the degrees of our soul, heaven flows into our minds and we become wiser and more loving even here on earth.

But it is also possible to close off the higher levels of our minds. We can dig in our heels and be close-minded about spiritual realities. We can deny God. We can think only about ourselves. We can even deliberately try to do harmful things to other people. There are levels to hell also.

When we have our higher levels opened and opening, we are angels in this world. I have a friend whose email address is “angel in training.” That is what we all are.

Swedenborg talks about these 3 levels in many places:

These three vertical levels are called earthly, spiritual, and heavenly. When we are born, we come first into the earthly level, which gradually develops within us in keeping with the things we learn and the intelligence we gain through this learning, all the way to that summit of intelligence called rationality. This by itself, though, does not open the second level, the one called spiritual. This level is opened by a love for being useful that comes from our intelligence; but the love for being useful is a spiritual one, a love for our neighbor. In the same way, this level can develop by incremental steps all the way to its summit; and it does so by our discovering what is true and good, or by spiritual truths. Even so, these do not open that third level that is called heavenly. This is opened by a heavenly love for being useful that is a love for the Lord; and love for the Lord is nothing but applying the precepts of the Word to our lives, these precepts being essentially to abstain from evil things because they are hellish and demonic and to do good things because they are heavenly and divine. This is how the three levels are opened in us sequentially (*Divine Love and Wisdom* n. 237).

As long as we are living in this world, we have no knowledge of any opening of levels within us. This is because our attention is focused on the earthly level, which is the most remote. We are thinking, intending, and talking and acting on that basis; and the spiritual level, which is deeper, does not communicate with the earthly level directly, but only by correspondence. Communication by correspondence is imperceptible (*Divine Love and Wisdom* n. 238).

There are three heavens, very clearly distinguished from each other. There is a central or third heaven, an intermediate or second one, and an outmost or first. These follow in sequence and are interdependent, like the highest part of the human body, the head; the middle, or torso; and the lowest, or feet; or like the highest, middle, and lowest parts of a house. The divine life that emanates and comes down from the Lord is in this kind of pattern as well. It is this necessity of design that determines the tripartite arrangement of heaven.

The deeper levels of the human mind and disposition are in a similar pattern as well. We have a central, intermediate, and outmost nature. This is because when humanity was created the whole divine design was gathered into it, to the point that as to structure, the human being is the divine design and is therefore a heaven in miniature. For the same reason we are in touch with heaven as to our inner natures and come into the company of angels after death—of angels of the central or the intermediate or the outmost heaven

depending on our acceptance of divine good and truth from the Lord during our earthly lives.

The divine nature that flows from the Lord and is accepted in the third or central heaven is called heavenly, and the angels there are consequently called heavenly angels. The divine nature that flows from the Lord and is accepted in the second or intermediate heaven is called spiritual, and the angels there are consequently called spiritual angels. The divine nature, though, that flows from the Lord and is accepted in the outmost or first heaven is called natural.
(*Heaven and Hell* n. 29, 30, 31)